

# Only three workers benefit from State Welfare Fund

## Most construction workers are ignorant of the welfare fund set up in 2006

SNIGDHA POONAM

Only three workers out of 1,40,000 in the state have received a welfare fund initiated by the Labour Department of Karnataka on November 1, 2006. Construction workers above the age of 18 and below 60, who have worked for five years or more, are entitled to this fund.

The Labour Department has only compensated two labourers for death and one for injury.

The Government had notified the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service), Karnataka Rules, 2006 about the Welfare Fund, as well as a Welfare Board for construction workers.

The 15-member Welfare Board has representatives of employers, workers and government officials. The Labour Minister is the chairman of the Board, which has autonomous powers. Minister for Labour Iqbal Ansari had declared while launching the scheme that about Rs. 200 crore would be mobilized annually for the Welfare Board.

The pre-requisite for claiming financial support is that the workers have to register their names at the local labour office or with the labour inspector by paying a fee of Rs. 25 and obtain an identity card.

The construction workers working in different construction sites are not even aware of scheme, let alone benefiting from it. Arundhati, who works at the construction site (renovation) of West Park Hotel on Church Street, is the mother of an infant but she said she did not avail the

monetary assistance supposed to be offered for childbirth. She has been a construction worker for more than 10 years.

Another construction labourer, Das at the construction site of Reebok Store in Brigade road expressed his ignorance about the welfare fund. He said that all the workers there have been in this business for their entire lives but they have never received any financial help by the government. He remarked that the workers live in penury after they are old or incapacitated; they either go back to their villages or make temporary shelters and live like vagabonds. Having a home of their own is a dream they can not afford. He said that if the schemes like housing loans, assistance to those injured and to the families of the deceased, are properly implemented, their lives wouldn't be so grim.

The Contractor at the same site said that he is not aware of any such initiative of the government, nor does he know of any labourer who has received monetary support from the Labour Department.

Anuradha, Assistant Labour Commissioner, Labour Department, said, "only three components of the scheme have been operationalised so far, which are death, serious injury and permanent disability. Rest of the aspects like childbirth, marriage, house loans etc. will be materialized only next year.

"The awareness about the fund is very limited as the project is in infancy. There are only 10 labour officers who have the responsibility of propagating the scheme

among labourers and they haven't had much success with it. The problem is that they aren't organized."

She said that though the scheme was launched in November 2006, the registration of labourers started only this May-June and they have 10,000 registered labourers in state by now.

She attributed the negligible success to the fact that the labourers are very laid back about exercising their rights. "Its because of their lackadaisical attitude that the project hasn't met the expectations. Even though the officers go and distribute the registration forms, the

labourers don't take the trouble of submitting the forms and their photographs for the identity card. There can be hardly anything that can be done without their contribution."

### State Welfare Fund provisions

Old age pension	Rs. 200 per month
Disability pension	Rs. 150 per month
Loan for purchase of tools	Rs. 5000
Loan for house	Rs. 50 000
Childbirth	Rs. 4000
Marriage	Rs. 3000
Two children	Rs. 3000
Medical expenses	Rs. 10 000
Children's education	
Accidental death/ disability	Rs. 1 lakh
Funeral expenses	Rs. 2000



Construction workers are unaware of the newly established Welfare Fund that may improve their living standards  
by author

## Boost in silk industry does not help Indian farmers

### Living conditions of farmers poor, as government tries to improve sericulture

AKANSHA PRADEEP

Increase in production of silk in India is making news but the state of farmers who depend on sericulture for their livelihood still remains the same. "Central silk board chairman H Hanumanthappa said on Thursday that India is on par with China and Japan in silk production due to technology and scientific research" as mentioned by a report in Indian Express.

The farmers near Tagachekuppe say that they sell the silk cocoons to dealers at a price fixed by the government in a government market. Nagraj a farmer said that they only get free medical aid from the government and no monetary benefits are given if there is any rise or profit by silk export. He said that they still manufacture silk in their house using the primitive methods of rearing silk worms. They have not been educated about using any new means of production to make their work.

Mr Mustafa Ali Khan, assistant director sericulture said that the farmers sell the silk cocoons in the government market through open auction. He said "the farmers get remuneration for the cocoons that they sell in the market depending on the quality of the cocoons apart from this they do not get any extra monetary benefits." He said that the farmers are given other benefits in the form of training, equipments

to assist in the silk production, disinfectants, the trainers visit the farmers house to help him improve ways of production, the government constructs rearing houses for them and even helps them with their mulberry plantation. He said that there are training centers in Kengeri where the farmers of the neighboring villages can attend camps and workshops for improving the quality of their silk, which could fetch them higher prices. In these training centers they invite scientists who teach the farmers how to produce multi-bivoltine, which is a hybrid variety of silk and usually fetches good prices.

Mr A S Khan officer in charge of the information centre (Central silk board) said that the farmers could sell the silk cocoons in different government markets across Bangalore. He said that they have licenses, which allows them to sell their produce in these markets. The highest bidder gets the respective cocoons. He also said that there are various schemes for the welfare of these farmers.

Although the officials in the sericulture department say that they lay a lot of emphasis on the farmers who practice sericulture, this does not seem true as the rise in the production does not help improve the conditions of farmers, as seen in Tagachekuppe.

## Dalit villagers untouchable to Brahmin postman

SEETHA LAKSHMI

The non-delivery of mail to Dalit residents by a Brahmin postman is now to be investigated by a fact-finding committee set up by the divisional post superintendent of Channapattana Taluk.

Dalit residents of Bevoor Village do not get their letters delivered at their door since their Brahmin postman, Mr. Chidambar Dixit refuses to enter the colony, citing caste.

Mr. Dixit has been postman of this village for twelve years, and yet has never once entered his assigned area. Resident Mr.Gavisidyya, a member of the

Ambedkar Dalit Federation said "we don't like the behaviour of Postman, he is working for our village from past 12 years but since then he refuses to enter our colony. Instead, he gives us mails calling us near to the stone bench or Ramamandir which is in the outskirts of colony."

This practice has inconvenienced the villagers. Mr. Marulaiah, a pensioner, has missed receiving his pensions on time: "If we miss to collect the letter at Ramamandir or Stone bench we have to go to his house but in much of the time, he wouldn't be there. So several times my pensions have

delayed," he says.

The accused postman defended himself, saying that his duty was only to ensure that the mail reaches its destined hands, and the mode of delivery is up to him. "ts not essential that whether we go into their colony or not. Our responsibility is to ensure whether people receive the mails or not. Thus all people concerned are receiving the mails. That's enough for my job".

A non-governmental organization (NGO) called Spandhana has taken up the cause of the residents and complained to the Post Office.

## Patients pay for treatment at 'free' government hospital

KAREN SOLOMON

The Isolation Hospital, which is supposed to treat patients free of cost, is demanding payment from patients for treatment.

Being a government hospital, its doctors must treat patients free of cost.

Mr. Abraham, however, said that he paid Rs. 500/- to be admitted when he had chicken pox, and another Rs. 500/- when he left.

Ms. Hema from Ramanagaram, whose husband had been admitted three days earlier for stiffness of joint, said that her mother-in-law paid Rs.500/- in advance. She said that the doctors visit the patients three times a day and whenever called for.

Mr. Kumar from Gubbi was

with his father who had been there for 20 days. He complained about toilets being unclean and about paying Rs. 500/- for the treatment.

Ms. Shanthi from Jeevanbhimanagar, whose husband was suffering from diarrhoea, said that she paid Rs. 100/- in advance, at the office, and again, Rs.100/- at the ward. She added that the doctor, Mr. Jayaram, said that she had to pay more before leaving.

Ms. Venkatalakshmi from Bhatrahalli was with her 12 year old son Manjunath, suffering from diarrhoea. She also said that she paid Rs. 100/- for him. She said that the hospital gave bread for breakfast in the mornings.

Mr. Anthony, from near Mandya, was with his wife, who

was suffering from diarrhoea and was in the 'Female Ward'. He refused to be photographed. He too said that he has to pay Rs. 500/-.

Ms. Hasina from K.R Puram, was outside the Female ward with her one- year- old daughter, suffering from diarrhoea. Since she couldn't use the toilets, she dirtied the footpath. She said that her husband paid Rs. 100/- and that they came in the night before.

The nurses did not respond to any questions and said that they were very busy because with new arrivals at the wards. One of the nurse's assistants refused to comment because she was afraid to say anything, but admitted that the practice of taking money from patients was wrong.